The Bank of England, Threadneedle Street, EC1.

Date: 1921-37 (sculptures c.1931-7)


Sculptor: Charles Wheeler.

Scultures. The main sculptures comprise six massive figures on each side of the main entrance at third floor level. These help define, and are essential components of, the main vertical articulations of the building [A-B,D]. These are (L to r.):

1. Naked male figure holding a massive bunch of keys, with locks and more keys behind [E].

2. Naked male figure holding thick chain, with keys behind head [F].

3. Partly-draped female figure holding cornucopia [G].

4. Similar (3 & 4 approximately mirror images) [H].

5. Naked male figure [I].

6. Naked male figure with right arm raised [J].

In the centre of the pediment at the top of the building is a female figure seated on a globe, with flowing hair and drapery behind her and over her knees, with a pile of coins to her side and a model of a classical temple on her lap [C].

The building is massive, and has decided neo-classical overtones with little evidence of Modernist influence: definitely a style for bank buildings. The sculptures on the other hand - even though by Charles Wheeler, a figurative sculptor cast in a decidedly academic mould - are in contrast quite Modernist in feel, if not merging into the semi-abstract. Their style would repay some analysis. Each statue appears to have been carved from one block so as to become all but free-standing, though anchored to structures at the back.

The two caryatids with cornucopias reprent "productiveness", while the four Atlantes on either side of them represent the warders of the Bank. Above them the central
figure on the pediment represents the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street and is also quite a departure from the earlier academic style prevalent on such buildings. It is clearly directly symbolic of the Bank's function and corporate identity.

Sources

Architects Journal Sept 21 1933, 251.
